

## Anglo-Saxon Coins found at Wedmore in 1853.

BY HENRY SYMONDS, F.S.A.

THE recent gift to our museum by Mrs. G. W. Saunders of six coins which formed part of this hoard led me to investigate the facts connected with the discovery. It then became apparent that the hoard had not been described in those books where such occurrences are generally recorded. The *Victoria History of Somerset* (vol. I) does not mention the find in the section devoted to Anglo-Saxon remains, nor does the map illustrating the text indicate Wedmore as one of the places in which antiquities of that period had come to light. The *Numismatic Chronicle* (the Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society) and also *Archæologia* are equally silent. Our own *Proceedings* for 1853 dismiss the subject with a brief reference to twelve "curious" Anglo-Saxon coins found at Wedmore and given to the Society. I was subsequently told that some details relating to the discovery were noted in *The Wedmore Chronicle* (1898) by the Rev. S. H. A. Hervey, who states that a crock containing more than 200 coins was found in the churchyard in March, 1853, and that the hoard was claimed by H.M. Treasury on behalf of the Crown. I need not here reproduce the paragraph (*op. cit.* II, 306) which alludes in general terms to the contents of the vessel, as I shall presently record more or less fully those portions of the hoard which escaped dispersal at the time of finding.

The next step was to locate the destination of the coins which, being of silver, were adjudged to be treasure-trove, after an inquisition by the coroner and a jury. The factor essential to a successful claim by the Crown seems to be that an unknown

owner should have hidden the articles with intent to recover possession at a future time. In the present case it might have been urged that the Royal prerogative did not wholly apply, in accordance with ancient custom, where the deposit was made in a place of sepulture, but the Treasury in reply might point to the absence of any evidence that Wedmore churchyard was a burial ground in the days of Harthacnut.

Enquiry at the British Museum elicited the information that in June, 1853, Anglo-Saxon coins to the number of 148 had been acquired by purchase from the Lords of the Treasury and added to the national collection; that they had been selected from about 200 specimens claimed as treasure-trove, being part of a larger number found at Wedmore. By the courtesy of the staff of the Medal Room I was able to copy their minute of the transaction and to examine a few coins which were the product of Somerset mints.

As will be seen in the annexed lists, the coins range from Æthelred II to Harthacnut, those struck during the reign of Cnut being in a large majority. Mr. Hervey was apparently unaware that Harthacnut was represented in the hoard; consequently the probable date of the deposit must be a few years later than his estimate, say, about 1042, or at all events before the Confessor's earliest coinage had been circulated. It will perhaps be useful to add that in the reigns now under consideration the Anglo-Saxon currency consisted of the silver penny, on the reverse side of which were the names of the moneyer responsible for the coin and of the place in which he worked, the latter being usually preceded by the word "on" now interpreted as meaning "at." Other monetary denominations, such as mark, shilling, pound, ora, etc., which occur in the legislation of that period, were monies of account only and did not exist as coins.

As it is needful to economize space, and as this Society is not primarily concerned with numismatic studies, I thought it sufficient to mention in the lists the mint-towns in which each type of penny was issued, except when the mint lay within the borders of Somerset; in such cases the full inscription on the reverse is given. For the same reasons the variations from the respective main types in each reign have not

been described. The antiquarian importance of the find can be measured by the fact that it contained so large a proportion of coins not previously represented in the British Museum cabinets. It may be added that the discovery in this county of a hoard of Anglo-Saxon money, as distinguished from sporadic finds of single coins, is in itself a very exceptional incident when compared with the almost innumerable finds of Roman currency in the same territory.

Classification according to the main types in Hildebrand's *Anglo-Saxon coins in the Royal Swedish cabinet of medals* (1881), and in Hawkins's *Silver coins of England* (1887).

The character  $\text{Ð}$  is the equivalent of the English "th"; and  $\text{ƿ}$  (the Anglo-Saxon *wen*) is the equivalent of P or W.

#### ÆTHELRED II.

*Hild. type E, and H's 1.*

Struck at  
Dover.

#### CNVT.

*Hild. type E, and H's 7.*

Struck at

Ilchester.	OSƿIE · ON · LIFEL.	
„	ÆLFSILE · ON · LIFL.	
„	ƿLFFELM · ON · LIFEL.	
Taunton.	EDRIC · O · TANTV.	
Barnstaple.		London.
Bristol.		Malmesbury.
Cambridge?		Shaftesbury.
Cricklade.		Southampton.
Exeter.		Winchester.
Lincoln.		

*Hild. type G, and H's 8.*

Struck at

Bath.	ÆÐESTAN · ON · BA.
„	ESTAN · ON · BAÐANN.
Bruton.	ÆLFELM · ON · BRIVT.

Langport.	EDRIC · ON · LANCPOR.
Cambridge.	Lincoln.
Chichester.	London (1 cut halfpenny).
Dover.	Oxford.
Exeter.	Stamford.
Huntingdon.	Warwick.
Leicester.	Winchester.
Lewes.	

*Hild. type H, and H's 1.*

Struck at

Bath.	ÆLFRIC · ON · BAÐA.
„	ÆÐESTAN · ON · BAÐ.
Crewkerne.	ƷINVS · ON · ERVCE.
Ichester.	ƷODRIC · ON · ƷIFEL.
Watchet.	ƷODCILD · ON · ƷECEED.
Bedford.	London.
Bristol.	Oxford.
Canterbury.	Salisbury.
Chichester.	Shrewsbury.
Dover.	Stamford.
Exeter.	Thetford.
Gloucester.	Wallingford.
Leicester.	Wilton.
Lewes.	Winchester.
Lincoln.	York.

*Hild. type I, and H's 2.*

Struck at

Leicester.	Southwark.
London.	Warwick.
Oxford.	Winchester.

## HAROLD I.

*Hild. type A, and H's 1.*

Struck at

Canterbury.	Warwick.
Wallingford.	Winchester.

*Hild. type B, and H's 2.*

Struck at

Bath.	ƿÆDEL · ONN · BA.	
Bristol.		Lincoln.
Canterbury.		London.
Exeter.		Wilton.
Lewes.		

## HARTHACNVT.

*Hild. type A, and H's 2.*

Struck at

Exeter (two).

It will be seen that there are fourteen coins issued from Somerset mints among the total of 148 (including a few duplicates) bought by the Trustees of the British Museum.

Turning now to the smaller number of pennies from this hoard which are in Taunton museum, we received twelve specimens in 1853 through the late Mr. R. P. Edwards who was a landowner in Wedmore and a grandfather of Mrs. Saunders. They were then claimed by the Treasury, seven being eventually returned to our Society. The remaining five were kept by the British Museum but were "replaced by others of equal rarity and value"; whether the substituted coins came originally from Wedmore cannot now be determined (*Proc.*, IV, i, 3). Of these twelve coins three only are labelled as having formed part of the hoard; the others are presumably merged in our general collection of Anglo-Saxon pennies. The examples which can be identified are as follows:—

## CNVT.

*Hild. type E, and H's 7.*

Struck at

Bruton.	ÆLFELM · ON · BRIV.
Ilchester.	ƿVLFELM · O · GIF.
„	OSPIE · ON · LIFE.

There remain for description six coins, also of Cnut, recently presented by Mrs. Saunders to our museum:—

*Hild. type G, and H's 8.*

Struck at Exeter.

*Hild. type H, and H's 1.*

Struck at Lincoln (two) and London.

*Hild. type I, and H's 2.*

Lincoln.

*Hild. type K, and H's 5.*

London (cut halfpenny).

Five of the last named do not show any variations of type or mint from those previously classified, but a cut halfpenny of London exhibits a very rare type (Hild. K) which is not otherwise represented in the hoard and is therefore of numismatic interest.

These fractions of a penny were obtained by the crude method of cutting the unit of currency into two portions, generally along a limb of the cross on the reverse. Occasionally the unit is subdivided into four, to make farthings as is supposed. It is a fortunate circumstance that the present market value of two cut halfpence is less than that of the undivided penny, so there is no temptation to mutilate existing pennies in order to provide collectors with halfpence. The so-called halfpennies are not often found; indeed some Anglo-Saxon hoards have not contained a single example, and in this case two only are known among a total of more than two hundred coins. That being so, it seems doubtful whether these fractional pieces were intended for currency; it is, I think, equally probable that their use was to adjust a given weight of silver. The subject may also be viewed from another angle. The making of authorised halfpence and farthings by means of the shears or chisel would literally cut at the root of the system on which the later Anglo-Saxon and the Anglo-Norman coinages were based, namely, that each coin should bear its place of mintage and the name of the *monetarius*. It would be almost impossible in the case of a cut halfpenny and quite impossible in the case of a farthing to bring home to any one official his responsibility for a base coin. An instance is at hand on Cnut's half coin of type K, where the moneyer's

name is entirely on the missing half. The laws of Æthelstan declare that the hand of an official proved guilty was to be fastened on the mint-smithy, and that if he wished to clear himself of the charge the hot iron ordeal was necessary, a test scarcely less barbarous than the penalty of guilt.

The problem of the standards of weight and fineness which governed the production of the currency at this period has often been discussed, as Anglo-Saxon legislation affords no clue to what was requisite in that connexion. I shall offer a solution of the doubt as to the quality of the silver used in the mints, but will deal first with the question of weight, in which respect the coins show wide divergences. An example may be cited from two pennies of Cnut of the *same type* and struck at Ilchester which weigh 13·2 grains and 21·6 grains respectively, a disparity beyond any conceivable loss of weight due to long circulation. On the other hand, two coins from the mint at Bath, again of the same type, turn the scale at 22·3 and 22·7 grains, thus conforming with commendable accuracy to the traditional, but unproved, standard of 22·5 grains to the silver penny (*cf.* B.M. A.-S. Cat. II, 256 and 270). Having regard to these variations I think it is impossible to define what limits of weight were fixed for the guidance of a moneyer. It seems not unlikely that in some currency transactions payment was made by weight and not by tale, as Domesday refers to that method of satisfying a claim. As regards the fineness or quality of the Saxon penny I shall be on firmer ground. The actual standard of fineness of our post-Norman silver coinage was established (with certain exceptions in Tudor days) at 11ozs. 2dwts. pure silver and 18dwts. alloy in each pound troy, or ·925 per 1000. This English standard has been assumed, in the absence of any literary evidence, to have been derived from the regulations of the Anglo-Saxon and Norman kings. In the interests of science and for the purpose of this investigation I caused an assay to be made of a penny of Cnut from my own cabinet, as a test by the furnace discloses the composition of the metal more accurately than by taking its specific gravity or by using the touchstone and needles in the case of gold. The coin chosen was of Hildebrand's type G, reading GODMAN ON LVN (London). The report to me, after

a double assay by Johnson, Matthey and Co., Ltd., was "11ozs. 6dwts. fine silver in the pound troy," the millesimal equivalent being .943. This result indicates that the quality of Cnut's money was surprisingly good, being appreciably better than its traditional standard. Indeed, if allowance be made for the inevitable surface corrosion, which would be reflected in the report of the analysis, the silver may have been nearly without alloy when it was struck into coin in the eleventh century. I notice, in this connexion, that a statute of Alfred, cap. III, provides that the offender shall pay a fine of "5 pounds of pure silver pennies" (Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*).

The legislative penalties imposed on fraudulent Saxon and Danish moneyers connote an intention to prove the output of the mints, whereby adulteration or other offences could be exposed. In such examinations we have the genesis of that formal testing of the coinage known to us as a trial of the pyx, which is in all likelihood the most ancient civil ceremony surviving to-day in this country. I have shewn elsewhere<sup>1</sup> that the earliest recorded trials of the pyx, in that particular form, occurred in 5 Edward I (1276-7) when the practice was firmly established, and that they have continued in unbroken sequence down to our time. Although documentary proof is wanting we may be certain that the Normans when they adopted without alteration the Confessor's monetary system did not omit the precautions which had ensured the purity of Anglo-Saxon currency and made it acceptable in Scandinavian lands.

I would refer those who are interested in the subject-matter of these notes to an article written in 1849 by our first honorary secretary, the Rev. T. F. Dymock, which contains a list, with two useful plates, of all Somerset coins then known to numismatists (*Proc.* I, ii, 12). After more than seventy years only one material addition need be made to his list, namely the inclusion of Watchet and its coins among the mints which were working *after* the Conquest.

1. *Brit. Num. Jour.*, IX, 209 seq., and cf. *Exch. Accts.*, 301/8. P.R.O.